

**ANG****Bayan**

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Editorial

Our answer to Esperon: More victories in the armed struggle

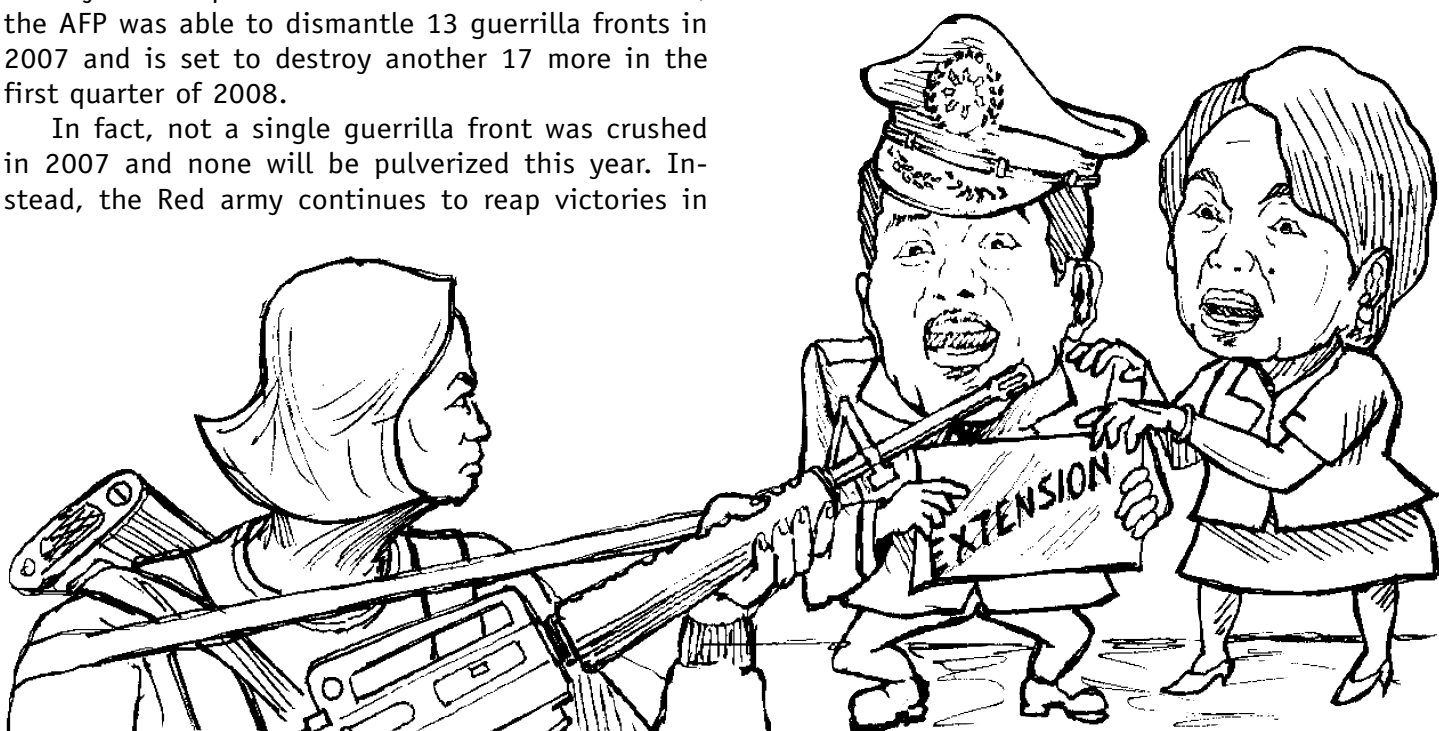
The series of victorious tactical offensives these past few weeks constitute the most stinging rebuke against Gen. Hermogenes Esperon's claims that the New People's Army (NPA) has been crushed and will be decimated before he retires.

The Arroyo regime claims that the extension of Esperon's term as chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) was done to allow him to continue the momentum he has gained in the counterrevolutionary war. Esperon boasts that under his watch, the AFP was able to dismantle 13 guerrilla fronts in 2007 and is set to destroy another 17 more in the first quarter of 2008.

In fact, not a single guerrilla front was crushed in 2007 and none will be pulverized this year. Instead, the Red army continues to reap victories in

the armed struggle and the revolutionary forces continue to expand and consolidate guerrilla fronts and bases.

Esperon was even dealt a double blow when the NPA scored successive victories in tactical offensives launched in Davao Oriental and Compostela Valley while he was in Mindanao to rally military troops for the "total war" against the NPA. The AFP suffered more than 40 casualties in the region in a



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matter of days and lost a number of high-powered firearms to the NPA.

This was quickly followed by victorious tactical offensives in Batangas, Albay, Sorsogon and Bukidnon.

Contrary to Esperon's pipe dreams, it is not the AFP that will crush the NPA. Rather, it is the NPA that is slowly annihilating weak and isolated units of the AFP.

More raids and ambushes are set to be launched and won in the coming weeks and months in response to the central Party leadership's directive to intensify tactical offensives. The greater number

Tactical offensives in Southern Tagalog and other areas

February 3. Five elements of the 29th IB were wounded in an ambush by a platoon from the NPA's Front 89 in Sitio Kalanganan, San Vicente, Bukidnon.

February 2. A sergeant commanding a military detachment in Badian, Oas, Albay was killed in an NPA attack at around 3 p.m. The Red fighters seized a .45 cal. pistol from him.

February 1. Four soldiers from the 9th IB and 565th Engineering Construction Battalion were seriously wounded after being ambushed by more than ten NPA Red fighters in Barangay Buenavista, Bacon, Sorsogon at around 4 p.m.

January 31. A soldier was wounded when 20 Red fighters harassed a detachment of the 733rd Combat Squadron of the Philippine Air Force in Clayo Village, Nasugbu, Batangas at around 1:30 p.m.

January 23. A soldier and a CAFGU element were wounded in a firefight between the military and the NPA in Barangay Marfil, Rosario, Agusan del Sur.

December 29. Four soldiers from the 21st IB were killed in an ambush by Red fighters of the Danilo Ben Command (NPA-Cagayan province) in Sitio Lagom, Barangay Lipatan, Sto. Niño, Cagayan. AB

of victories reaped by the NPA is in preparation for the expansion and establishment of stable base areas, the completion of the strategic defensive and the advance towards the next higher

stage of people's war. As a result, the Party is sure to have a joyous celebration of its 40th anniversary at the end of 2008.

The revolutionary army will gain strength, grow and accumulate more victories against the detested and demoralized puppet army. In areas where the NPA is relatively strong, it can muster a force several times bigger than the enemy forces' weak and isolated units and quickly win tactical battles. Even in areas where the revolutionary forces are relatively small, they may launch sniping and sparrow operations against an enemy that has been rendered virtually blind and deaf.

It is the NPA's victorious tactical offensives in the coming weeks and months that will decisively give the lie to Esperon and the AFP propagandists' mendacious declarations. AB



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7 tactical offensives in Southern Mindanao

Various units under the Merardo Arce Command-Southern Mindanao Regional Operations Command-New People's Army (NPA) conducted successive victorious tactical offensives these past two weeks. While the bulk of the enemy's forces (73rd IB and Army Scout Rangers) were busy launching Oplan Bantay Laya (OBL) in the western part of the region (Talaingod, Davao del Norte), the people's army inflicted blows on military and police troops in the eastern side (Compostela Valley/Davao Oriental).

All in all, the military and police were confirmed to have suffered at least 41 casualties while not a single casualty was reported on the side of the people's army.

February 6. Two security guards of JB Mining in Olaycon, Monkayo, Compostela Valley were killed when NPA guerrillas raided the

mining company owned by despotic Monkayo mayor Manuel "Jun" Brilantes.

Morning of January 30. Seven soldiers and a CAFGU element were killed and ten other soldiers were wounded in an ambush by a combined force of Red fighters from Fronts 15 and 25 on troops of the 67th IB conducting patrols in Kinablangan, San Victor and Kampawan in Baganga, Davao Oriental. Seized from the military were an M60 machine gun and two M16 rifles. The Red fighters ambushed the military after barriofolk told the people's army that the soldiers were looking for an NPA camp.

5 p.m. of January 30. An intelligence operative of the 1102nd Police Mobile Group was killed and two CAFGU elements were wounded in Barangay Bukal, Nabunturan, Compostela Valley when they fought it out with Red fighters from Front 27 tasked to arrest them.

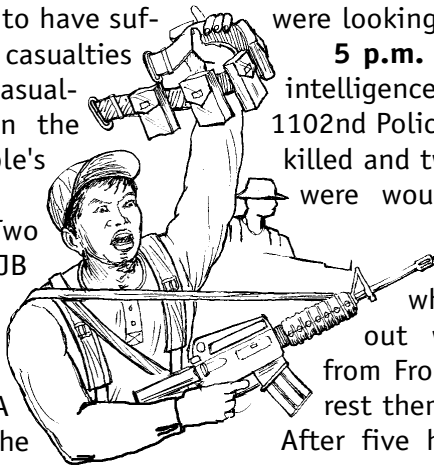
After five hours, a policemen

was killed and ten others were wounded when the NPA 5th Pulang Bagani Command ambushed elements of the 1102nd Police Mobile Group on patrol in Sitio Spar 2, Ngan, Compostela, Compostela Valley.

Morning of January 28. A soldier was killed and three paramilitary elements were wounded when members of the NPA Conrado Heredia Command of Front 20 sniped at and harassed a detachment of the 72nd IB in Carmen, Boston, Davao Oriental.

January 24. Two soldiers under the 103rd Division Reconnaissance Company's Task Force Raptor were killed and three others were wounded in an encounter with a unit of the NPA Armando Dumanan Command (Front 33) in Barangay San Agustin, Tagum City.

4th week of January. A column of soldiers under the 28th IB suffered an undetermined number of casualties when Red fighters from Front 25 sniped at them in Barangay Andap, New Bataan, Compostela Valley.



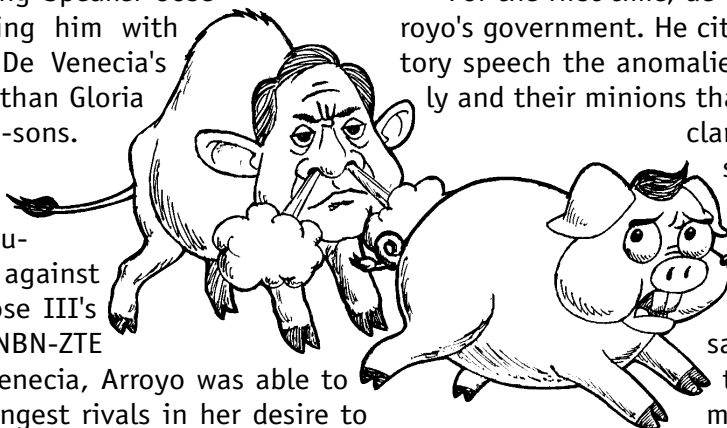
Political confrontation looms

Administration allies in Congress succeeded this February 4 in ousting Speaker Jose de Venecia, replacing him with Rep. Prospero Nograles. De Venecia's ouster was led by no less than Gloria Arroyo's two congressmen-sons.

It took a relatively long time for Malacañang's minions to maneuver and seek vengeance against de Venecia for his son Jose III's exposé of the anomalous NBN-ZTE contract. In ousting de Venecia, Arroyo was able to get rid of one of her strongest rivals in her desire to

stay in power beyond 2010.

For the first time, de Venecia directly criticized Arroyo's government. He cited one by one in his valedictory speech the anomalies involving the Arroyo family and their minions that he knew of. At last, he declared outright that his son spoke the truth about the NBN-ZTE contract. He also said he knew about attempts to commit fraud in the 2004 elections. He assailed the Arroyos for favoring their cronies in the government contract with Transco.



He also described how the Arroyo family has been controlling congressional funds.

De Venecia said his current criticism of the administration was a declaration of war against Arroyo whom he had long been defending amid threats to remove her from power. Now, he said, he was ready to unite with the opposition to expose and put an end to the controversies surrounding the regime.

With the Arroyo and de Venecia camps parting ways, a new series of political confrontations looms to shake anew the foundations of the corrupt regime. De Venecia is expected to disclose his extensive knowledge of Arroyo's skeletons, worsening the political crisis besetting the regime.

The imminent clash between the two cliques presents favorable conditions that the broad anti-Arroyo forces must take advantage of to give renewed momentum to efforts to oust the hated regime. **AB**

Another witness confirms NBN-ZTE anomaly

Another witness has confirmed the involvement of former COMELEC chairman Benjamin Abalos and Gloria Arroyo's husband Mike in the anomalous National Broadband Network (NBN)-ZTE project. Rodolfo Noel Lozada Jr., one of the project's consultants, bared that everything Jose de Venecia III and former NEDA director-general Romulo Neri have said about the overpricing and kickbacks received by Abalos and Mike Arroyo are true.

The regime attempted to put a gag on Lozada before he made his disclosures in the early morning of February 7. Upon his return to the country on February 5, he was met by PNP operatives, brought to Laguna and forced to draft a document stating that he had requested for "police protection." The PNP also stated that one of Lozada's sisters had made a similar request—something that Lozada's sibling had denied doing. Lozada was released only after signing an affidavit absolving Malacañang of involvement in the NBN-ZTE anomaly.

After he was released, however, Lozada decided to seek refuge with the Catholic church and disclose the truth in a press conference. He also agreed to testify before the Senate and announced his resignation from the government.

The Palace is now in a bind trying to deny its role in the attempts to silence Lozada.

A fourth witness is reportedly set to surface and further buttress the exposés made by de Venecia, Neri and Lozada. **AB**

Police arrest KMP leader; military kills pastor

Among the heinous crimes of the Arroyo regime these past few weeks were the murder of a UCCP pastor in Leyte and the killing of an activist in Bohol. In Tagum's hinterlands, residents continue to evacuate due to intense military operations in their area. In Manila, more than 80,000 residents are set to lose their homes because of a railroad building projec. In Negros, police arrested a KMP leader, and in Palawan, the military abducted two alleged members of the New People's Army (NPA). A mass leader from Cebu was likewise abducted and held for two days by the military before he escaped.

January 31 up to the present. Troops from the 730th Combat Group of the Philippine Air Force have been harassing residents of Hacienda Looc and Barangay Natipuan in Nasugbu, Batangas after an NPA attack on an AFP detachment in nearby Barangay Calayo on January 31. At least 25 families were forced to



evacuate to avoid harassment by the military. That same day, AFP troops burned down the houses of Sopreno Cabral, Florence Reyes and Toribio Reyes, all residents of Hacienda Looc. The AFP has set up checkpoints in Barangay Calayo since February 1 where travelers are blocked, interrogated and harassed. Among the victims were Barangay Looc Elementary School principal Coche Polagan and her husband Narsing who were forced out of their van and made to kneel on the pavement.

January 28. Elements of the Negros Occidental Police Provincial Office arrested and tortured Randall Echanis, 60, deputy secretary general for external affairs of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP). Echanis was arrested in Barangay Calumangan, Bago City at around 2 p.m. while he was at a seminar at-

tended by leaders of farm workers under the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW). Up to 30 armed operatives in civilian clothes nabbed Echanis.

Echanis was arrested for his alleged involvement in the deaths of 67 persons in Inopacan, Leyte in 1985. He and Rep. Satur Ocampo are among 52 individuals accused in this case. Ocampo was arrested last year on such charges but released after the court dismissed the trumped-up case.

Like Ocampo, Echanis was likewise in prison when the alleged incident occurred in Leyte. His arrest thus constitutes a clear case of harassment against persons like him who are active in the democratic movement. The KMP has strongly condemned Echanis' arrest and torture.

The NDFP has likewise assailed Echanis' arrest as a violation of the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG). Echanis is a member of the NDFP Reciprocal Working Committee on Socio-Economic Reforms in the peace talks.

January 26. Police operatives in Palawan and elements of the Armed Forces Western Command (Wescom) abducted Christine Butaca, 27, and her husband Wilson Mangao. Authorities, who claimed that the couple are members of the NPA-Palawan, failed to present a warrant of arrest when they seized Butaca and Mangao. The couple were then attending the wedding of Butaca's sister in Barangay Bono-Bono, Bataraza, Palawan. The Provincial Prosecutor's Office later ordered the military and police to release the couple after a few days upon finding that the AFP did not have any strong evidence against them.

January 24. More than 1,000

residents of Barangay San Agustin, Tagum City were forced to evacuate after soldiers arrested male residents and accused them of being NPA members. The men were forced to lie face down on the ground and subjected to interrogation. These brutal acts against the residents were in retaliation for the wounding of Cpl. Elpidio Catulba, an ele-

ment of the 103rd Division Reconnaissance Company, in a firefight between the NPA and the AFP that day.

The forcible evacuation disrupted classes at the San Agustin Elementary School.

January 23. Military thugs aboard a motorcycle killed Palomino Catambis, 50, a pastor of the

Principe granted writ of amparo

The Supreme Court approved on February 3 a petition for a writ of amparo filed by Lorena Santos, daughter of abducted NDFP consultant Elizabeth Principe, 56. Following the Supreme Court decision, the case has been transferred to the Court of Appeals which has in turn ordered the police to present Principe in a hearing set for February 11. Principe was abducted in November after a check-up at a clinic in Cubao, Quezon City.

In her petition, Santos scrutinized six warrants of arrest against her mother and said that all of them were suspicious and violative of the law. Principe's abductors therefore had no sufficient bases and valid warrants to arrest her. Santos also asserted that Principe's transfer to Ilocos Sur at midnight of January 30 was illegal. Her family fears that she would be tortured by elements of the 5th Infantry Division and that her life would be in danger. The police likewise failed to formally inform Principe's lawyers about her transfer.

The Supreme Court also approved Santos petition for a writ of habeas corpus in behalf of her father Leo Velasco who was abducted in Cagayan de Oro City in February 2007. Velasco has not been surfaced to date. Santos asked the Court of Appeals to order the police and military to surface her father and explain why they continue to detain or hide him. AB

Supreme Court approves rules on writ of habeas data

The Supreme Court approved on February 1 the implementing rules for the writ of habeas data. Under this writ, a court may order the military and police to present documents or information in their possession about the petitioner. A petitioner may demand that such information be amended, rectified, hidden or destroyed to protect his privacy.

The rules took effect on February 2. The Supreme Court issued the writ of habeas data after coming out with the writ of amparo, a legal instrument that enables victims or those in danger of becoming victims of human rights violations (especially those whose lives are being threatened), to seek protection. AB



United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). The murder occurred in Sitio Catoogan, Barangay Balocawe, Abuyog, Leyte at around 7:30 a.m. Catambis died on the spot after nine bullets fired from a 9 mm pistol hit his back. He was also aboard a motorcycle and was bound for the Abuyog town center when he was shot at close range. Catambis is the second UCCP pastor slain in the island. In May 2005, military elements also killed Rev. Edwin Lapuz in San Isidro, Leyte.

January 17. Masked men killed environmental activist Ronaldo Sendrijas, 35, in Graham Avenue,

Tagbilaran City, Bohol province at 9:20 p.m. He died from two bullet wounds to his nape. Sendrijas had just left the Ramiro Community Hospital to buy medicine for his sister.

Sendrijas, a former seminarian and political detainee, was arrested in Cebu in 2003 for rebellion cases filed against him in Bohol and Cebu. He was released in 2006 after posting bail.

Since his release, he has been subjected to constant harassment by

the military. Aside from the rebellion case, the military has linked him to two murder cases in 2006 and 2007. He

was also constantly pressured to pose as an NPA surrenderee and renounce armed struggle. In November 2007, military elements led by Lt. Col.

Cesar Yano, chief of the 302nd Bde raided his and his neighbors' houses in Baran-gay San Jose,

Inabanga, Bohol, accusing him of keeping a firearm. No weapons were found by the raiding team.

January 13-17. Ata-Manobo tribespeople from 65 communities in Talaingod, Davao del Norte were forced to evacuate due to intense military operations in their area. Two evacuees—a child and an elderly man from Sitio Sasu, Barangay Palma Gil—died on January 13 due to severe hunger. Instead of assisting the evacuees, however, Talaingod officials have denied that violations of human rights had occurred. Troops of the 73rd IB conducting operations have also been harassing leaders of the Salugpong ng Ta Tanu Igkanugon, a local organization of Ata-Manobo tribespeople in Talaingod.

January 12 up to the present. Brutal military operations by the 56th IB have resulted in mass arrests, forced evacuations and burning of peasants' houses in Sitios Gintalaokan and Bantolinao in Barangays Talalak and Nagbinlod in Sta. Catalina, Negros Oriental, reported Karapatan-Central Visayas. A yet unidentified peasant was arbitrarily killed by elements of the 56th IB Bravo Coy on January 27 when soldiers vented their ire on residents after the escape of



80,000 NCR residents to lose their homes

More than 80,000 residents of communities alongside railroad tracks in parts of the National Capital Region are set to lose their homes due to a railroad building project funded by the South Korean and Philippine governments. The railroad project will connect the North Terminal of the Northrail Project in Caloocan City to the northern tip of the Southrail Project in Calamba, Laguna.

Affected residents are protesting their forcible evacuation from their homes. Demonstrators from the Koalisyon ng mga Samahan sa Riles Katimugan massed up outside the Pacific Star Building in Makati City and demanded an audience with South Korean ambassador Hong Jong-ki.

There are no plans in place for the relocation of the soon to be displaced residents.

CPA condemns mass leader's illegal detention

The Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA) strongly condemned the continued incarceration of Jose Cawiding, secretary-general of the Metro Baguio Tribal Elders and Leaders Assembly (MBTELA) and former staff of the CPA's Education Commission and Elder's Desk. Military elements arrested Cawiding in October 2007 for his alleged involvement in the death of a soldier in an ambush by the New People's Army (NPA) in Mountain Province in July 2003. Cawiding remains detained despite the fact that the prosecution could not produce any witnesses to prove such accusations.

AB

Reynold Carillo, 18, one of the residents arrested by the military. Two other farmers from Sitio Lagasan, Barangay Nagbinlod named Willy, 30 and Bianco, 60 are also being forced to serve as guides and human shields by the soldiers.

January 4. Seven agents of the Intelligence Service of the AFP (ISAFP) abducted Melvin Yares, 27, chairman of the Kahugpungan sa Kabus sa Basak (KAKABAS) in Lapu-Lapu City. The abduction took place at around 9:30 p.m. at the corner of Lincoln and Plaridel Sts. at the Carbon Public Market. Yares was forced into a white van, blindfolded, detained and interrogated about his alleged involvement in the NPA. He said he was also being forced to spy for the military, pose as a surrendering Red fighters and denounce Kadamay, Anakpawis and other legal progressive organizations before the media. He saw an opportunity to escape at around 2 a.m. on January 6 when he was brought to a dark and isolated area in Sitio Timpolok, Barangay Gun-ob, Lapu-Lapu City to be tortured. He dashed towards a passing vehicle and jumped to the other side of the road. Yares plans to file charges against his military abductors. AB

NDF-Bicol condemns plans for more CAFGU

The National Democratic Front-Bicol assailed plans by the 9th ID to arm 4,000 CAFGU troops in the region ostensibly to pulverize the revolutionary movement in Bicolandia before 2010. The NDF-Bicol said the move would only lead to more human rights violations and extrajudicial killings.

The NDF-Bicol belied claims by Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Sordista, 9th ID chief, that the revolutionary forces suffered huge losses in the region's six provinces in 2007. In fact, the NPA was able to preserve itself and gain strength despite the deployment to the region of a battalion of soldiers and companies of Scout Rangers in 2007.

On the other hand, the reactionary military has been suffering serious casualties and grave demoralization and is even more isolated from the people due to intense human rights violations. The NDF-Bicol cited as example the mass desertion of elements of the 9th IB in Donsol, Sorsogon this January. The AFP reportedly had to call in barrio folk to haul more than 20 rifles left behind by soldiers who had gone AWOL. The soldiers complained about their very low subsistence allowance, delayed bonuses and their superior officers' refusal to grant them leave to visit their families last Christmas and New Year. AB

Massacre in Sulu

Families, relatives as well as local government officials in Sulu are seeking justice for eight Moro civilians massacred by soldiers on February 4. A military unit mercilessly gunned down eight residents of the island barangay of Ipil, Maimbung, Sulu including a pregnant woman and two children. The victims are Maris Fayjian, 4; Rismi Lahim, 9; Narsiya Lahim, 24, who was pregnant; Arnalyn Lahim, 37; Eldishin Lahim, 37, a barangay councilman of Ipil; and Sgt. Ibnul Wahid, 35, a former member of the Moro National Liberation Front now an integree of the Philippine Army 6th ID, who was off-duty and resting in his house.

Maj. Gen. Ruben Rafael, commander of Task Force Comet reported that a firefight had taken place during pursuit operations against Abu Sayyaf elements who had abducted a businesswoman. But families of the victims said that the soldiers continued firing at them even after they shouted that they were civilians. The soldiers also barged into some houses and ordered residents to lie face down on the floor before shooting at them. AB

NDF-Cagayan Valley condemns rape, summary execution of medics

The National Democratic Front-Cagayan Valley strongly condemned the 45th IB for the summary execution and rape of three women medics in July 2007.

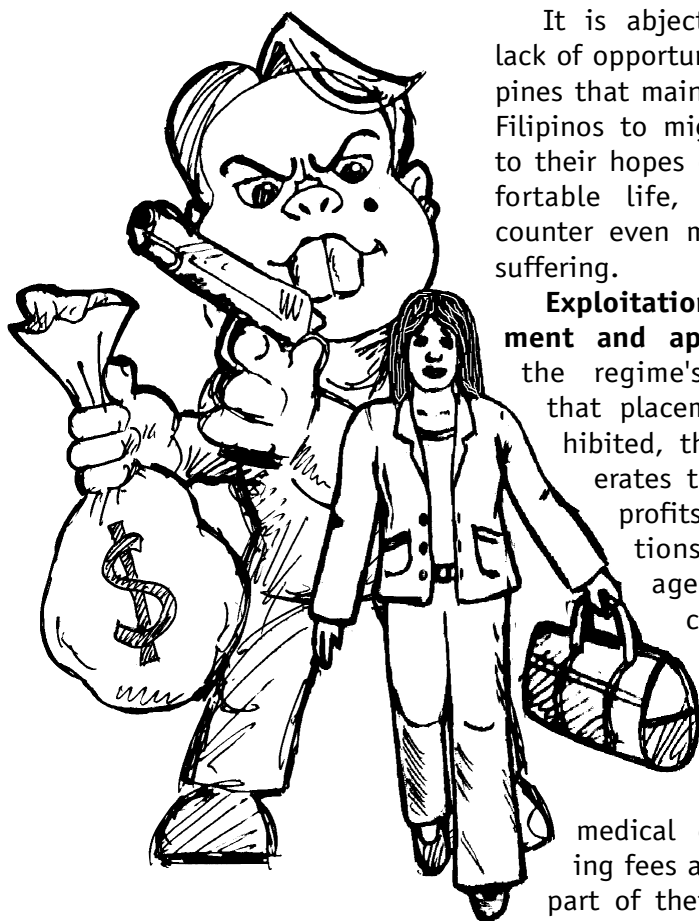
Jansel Zeta Arnato (Ka Guillen), Mylene Gubat (Ka Ryza) and Catherine Zapanta (Ka Maliw), all members of the regional medical staff in Cagayan Valley were in Sitio Lumalog, Barangay Cadsalan, San Mariano, Isabela on July 30, 2007 to conduct a medical mission when they were attacked by combined forces of the 45th IB and the 52nd Reconnaissance Coy led by 1Lt. Michael Victoria.

Investigations revealed that Ka Guillen, Ka Ryza and Ka Maliw were unarmed when they surrendered to the soldiers. Under the AFP's custody, they were raped by the soldiers and later shot in

Continued on "NDF-Cagayan Valley..." page 8

Blood, sweat and lives of migrant workers

The regime continues to reinforce its policy of exporting Filipino workers, planning to send abroad one million workers annually. Up to 2,700 Filipinos leave everyday to work overseas. There are currently up to 9.2 million (more than 10% of the population) Filipino migrant workers or overseas contract workers (OCWS). This figure does not include undocumented Filipinos abroad.



It is abject poverty and the lack of opportunities in the Philippines that mainly drive millions of Filipinos to migrate. But contrary to their hopes of enjoying a comfortable life, they usually encounter even more hardships and suffering.

Exploitation during recruitment and application. Despite the regime's pronouncements that placement fees are prohibited, the government tolerates their collection and profits from the operations of recruitment agencies that often charge exorbitant fees. Applicants thus have to borrow money or sell property to be able to pay for medical checkups, processing fees and the like. A huge part of their incomes goes to

debt payments.

Women applicants for domestic helper jobs are made to stay in the houses of illegal recruiters while in the Philippines. They then become unpaid servants for periods ranging from a few days to several months on the pretext that they need training for their future jobs overseas.

Wage levels offered by the agencies are often lower than those stipulated in the contract, with the agencies receiving the difference monthly. Aside from this, applicants often do not get paid for a number of months, with their salaries going to the agencies that facilitated their trips abroad.

From January to October 2007, up to 132 agencies were caught engaging in illegal recruitment, victimizing up to 850 persons, most of them from Metro Manila. The actual number of victims of illegal recruiters is far, far higher. Even if they have legal status, recruiters are usually engaged nonetheless in illegal activities.

The main destinations of OCWs are South Korea, Spain, the United Arab Emirates and the US. Most applicants get jobs as factory workers, hotel staff, caregivers and domestic helpers. In other cases, desperate persons compelled to become overseas contract workers still go abroad despite prior knowledge that they will end up becoming prostitutes in their would-be jobs.

Performance and repatriation bond scheme. The latest scheme to victimize migrant workers is Memorandum Circular 4 issued by the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) requiring foreigners wishing to engage in direct hiring of Filipinos to post a \$3,000 performance bond and a \$5,000 repatriation bond per worker. According to Migrante, this stringent requirement will lead to many job

"NDF-Cagayan Valley..." from page 7

the head at close range. Their bodies were brought aboard a military helicopter and dumped at the riverbank in Barangay Minanga, San Mariano.

Residents in the area said that a few hours after the attack, they heard one of the soldiers saying, *"Kawawa naman 'yung tatlo, nireyp ng mga kasama namin. Mahirap lang magsalita, baka mawalan ako ng trabaho."* (I pity those three; they were raped by our fellow soldiers. It's difficult to speak out because I might lose my job.)

When the victims' bodies were found, Ka Guillen was not wearing a T-shirt beneath her jacket and both her arms were broken. Ka Ryza's pants were unzipped.

Relatives of the three medics plan to file charges against elements of the 45th IB who perpetrated the heinous crime.

AB

losses for OCWs. Should foreign employers post these bonds, the ultimate victim will be the OCWs themselves who will be overworked so the foreigners could get their money's worth. The extra expenses will also be charged against the workers' pay. The strict requirements for direct hiring will also force OCWs to approach exploitative recruitment agencies, rendering them vulnerable to the agencies' abuses.

Abuses and cruelties abroad.

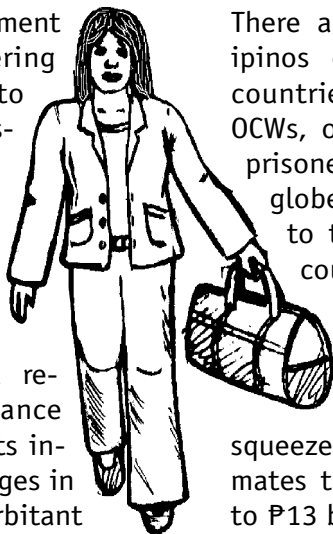
According to Migrant-Middle East, it receives at least 15 complaints and requests for assistance daily. The complaints involve arbitrary changes in work contracts, exorbitant application fees, maltreatment and sexual abuse, among others. This is aside from the complaints filed by families of OCWs as well as applicants.

Philippine embassies in many countries as well as the Philippine Labor & Welfare Offices also receive many complaints. At the Philippine embassy in Kuwait, for example, an estimated 10,000 requests for assistance by Filipinos were received from January to June 2007 or an average of 123 cases daily. Among the problems referred were requests to locate OCWs, for repatriation to the Philippines, financial support, police clearances and repatriation of bodies of deceased OCWs.

Many migrant workers come home lifeless. Eight to ten remains of OCWs are repatriated to the Philippines daily, their deaths due to a variety of reasons. In Qatar alone, at least 37 Filipinos died in the first six months of 2007. Twenty-six of them died of heart at-

tacks. There are likewise frequent news reports about Filipino women migrant workers who were killed and made to look like suicides.

The Philippine government is utterly inutile in the face of so many cases of injustice suffered by OCWs abroad. Government agencies move at a snail's pace except when confronted by massive protests. There are currently up to 33 Filipinos on death row in various countries. An estimated 5,000 OCWs, on the other hand, are imprisoned in various parts of the globe, mostly for crimes related to their illegal entry into the country they work in.



Highway robbery by the regime. Extortion is legal and systematic with the way the regime squeezes OCWs dry. Migrant estimates that the regime collects up to P13 billion in fees for passports, birth certificates and forced membership in the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA). Migrant workers oppose the mandatory \$25 membership fee in OWWA imposed by the regime based on an exchange rate of P51: \$1 even if a dollar is now worth only P41.

The POEA requires applicants for domestic helper jobs to join its "Pre-Qualification for Household Service Workers" program worth P10,000-P15,000. The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and its approved training centers also collect P500-30,000 (\$10.92-\$655). These training centers are usually owned by, or are business partners of, recruitment agencies.

Remittances much coveted by the regime. The plight of workers in other countries is of no consequence to the regime. All it cares about is the billions of pesos worth of remittances that keep the Philippine economy afloat.

The highest amount of remittances coursed through banks by OCWs (\$1.388 billion) was registered in September 2007. It was 17.1% bigger than the level reached in September 2006. This raised to \$11.9 billion the amount of remittances in the first ten months of the year, 15.2% higher than the same period in 2006. It is estimated that OCWs remitted up to \$14.3 billion in 2007. This year, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas expects overall remittances by OCWs to reach \$16.2 billion (including those not coursed through the banking system).

With the continued devaluation of the US dollar, however, the peso equivalents of OCW remittances have been dwindling.

At the same time, OCWs are bludgeoned by relentless increases in the prices of goods and services and the peso's diminishing purchasing power. OCW families have therefore been benefiting less and less. OCWs are obliged to severely scrimp on their expenses to enable them to send bigger remittances to the Philippines.

Organize and mobilize migrant workers. As the unemployment crisis worsens in the Philippines, more and more Filipino workers are forced to go overseas to find livelihood. They may have tried to escape the grave economic crisis in the Philippines, but they end up becoming even more exploited and oppressed abroad. Thus, it is the duty of the revolutionary forces to arouse, organize and mobilize the millions of Filipino migrant workers abroad to defend their rights and interests and enjoin them to participate in the struggle for revolutionary change in the Philippines. They can also play a big role in linking up with anti-imperialist and revolutionary movements in their host countries.

AB



US on the verge of recession

Stock markets in the US and other parts of the globe have experienced frequent sudden and steep crashes these past several years. At the start of January, the first major crash occurred, spurred by disclosures of statistics on dwindling industrial production in the US and a spike in the price of crude oil to \$100/barrel in the international market. After a few days, this was followed by serious stock market crashes in the US, Europe and Asia—the worst since September 2001.

The relentlessly dire effects of the bursting of the housing bubble in the US were another contributory factor in these crashes, partly due to public revelations on the bankruptcies of many banks in the US and worldwide that had wide exposure to the housing frenzy. Foreclosures of home mortgages became rampant as did the collapse of manufacturing and the sluggishness of the local market and consumer spending in the US.

The crash of stock markets worldwide is but one of the many indications of the steep decline in the overall US economy. The US economy shrank in a major way in 2007. For four consecutive quarters, industrial production and manufacturing sales, the retail trade and people's real incomes plummeted. The US is estimated to enter into another recession this year.

Since the middle of 2007, industrial production has been taking a nose-dive. The rate of decline in December was the highest in four years. Employment growth rates in the US have been dwindling for more than a year, with the unemployment rate at 4.9%. In January, the US was struck with its

biggest unemployment rates in the last five years. As a consequence, there were declines in trading and consumer spending which constitute two-thirds of the US economy. They are projected to weaken further and take a plunge this year.

The effects of the bursting of the housing bubble have been worsening since August 2005. It is estimated that in 2008, house sales will drop by more than 12% all over the US. In the first eight months of 2007, foreclosure proceedings were begun in up to 1.7 million houses after owners failed to make their payments. It is estimated that up to 2.2 million houses will be confiscated in the next

two years. Massive defaults have likewise resulted in an estimated \$100 billion in losses by big banks and companies. The actual losses are reportedly much bigger, with banks in the US and abroad having invested up to \$1 trillion in this venture. The housing crisis in the US is expected to persist and worsen until 2009.

Another factor that has exacerbated the US economic crisis is the humongous deficit in the national budget amounting to \$413 billion. This came about due to the enormous tax deductions granted to monopoly capitalists, the huge costs of military-industrial contracts and the gargantuan expenses (more than \$1.1 trillion) involved in waging war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The US' trade deficit now comes to \$800 billion annually and its external debt has ballooned from \$5.7 trillion to \$9.1 trillion.

The value of the dollar has thus continuously shrunk, with more and more investors and governments preferring to shift to other currencies, mainly the Euro.

The US economy is not expected to recover in 2008. No less than the US Federal Reserve has said that the state of the economy is bound to worsen this year. Although it has yet to be declared officially by the US government that the country is now in recession, many economists believe that in actual fact, the US did enter into a recession this January.

In a desperate bid to avert the recession, the Bush regime is now push-



ing for a \$145 billion tax cut to cushion the losses of giant monopoly companies. The regime expects that by helping their businesses, these monopolies will be able to create jobs for an additional 500,000 workers. As a consolation, a one-time tax cut of up to \$1,500 per American family has also been proposed. These moves have purportedly been taken to enable companies and the general populace to have more funds available that could hopefully jump-start the market.

Bush has also proposed a \$3.1 trillion national budget, the biggest in the entire history of the US and 6% higher than that of 2007. The government deficit is projected to reach \$410 billion. Bush's avowed purpose is to pump prime the economy, but in fact, it is the funds for waging war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the entire military budget (with the Pentagon getting a 7.5% budget hike) that enjoyed the biggest budgetary increase. On the other hand, social services (Medicare and other health and education programs) as well as the agriculture, justice, transportation and interior departments all suffered budget cuts.

Bush's measures all clearly favor monopoly capitalists and all those who profit from the US' warmongering, while further depriving ordinary citizens. Instead of energizing the economy, these measures are seen to accelerate the US' inexorable slide towards recession. **AB**

US-Arroyo regime does not want peace talks

The US-Arroyo regime is not in favor of reviving formal peace talks between the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. Its real objective is to silence the people's army even as the regime's armed forces go on a relentless rampage.

This was the reaction on January 25 of Comrade Luis Jalandoni, chair of the NDFP Negotiating Panel, in response to Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita's reply to calls by the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform (PEPP) to revive formal peace talks between the NDFP and the GRP without preconditions. On the other hand, Jalandoni praised the PEPP and Archbishop Antonio Ledesma in particular for asserting that no conditions should be attached to reviving the talks.

The PEPP is composed of representatives of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), National Council of Churches of the Philippines (NCCP), Association of Major Religious Superiors of Men and Women in the Philippines (AMRSP) and the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC). Ermita's response to the PEPP's call, said Jalandoni, indicates that the US-Arroyo regime's real objective in negotiating is to have the people's army surrender its weapons and not to address the real interests of the Filipino people.

Farmers commemorate 21st Anniversary of Mendiola Massacre

Up to 6,000 peasants and their allies successfully commemorated on January 22 the 21st anniversary of the Mendiola Massacre. But before this, they were blocked by the police a few meters from the Mendiola Bridge where 13 farmers were massacred in 1987. Peasants and fisherfolk in the cities of Iloilo, Bacolod, Cebu and Davao also thundered the call for the enactment of the Genuine Agrarian Reform Bill as a substitute for the inutile CARP.

Starting January 16, farmers marching to Manila from Laguna, Quezon, Batangas, Cavite, Rizal, Mindoro and Bicol were blocked several times by the police. They were met by fellow farmers at the office of the Department of Agrarian Reform in Quezon City in the morning of January 22. By noontime, there were up to 6,000 rallyists when delegations from Central Luzon, Ilocos and Cagayan Valley joined them. With members of Anakpawis, KMU, Gabriela, COURAGE, PISTON, Kadamay, Anakbayan and other allied organizations and individuals, they marched towards Malacañang. Blocked, they held their program in front of the University of the East.